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BULLETIN
OF
THE PENNSYLVANIA MUSEUM

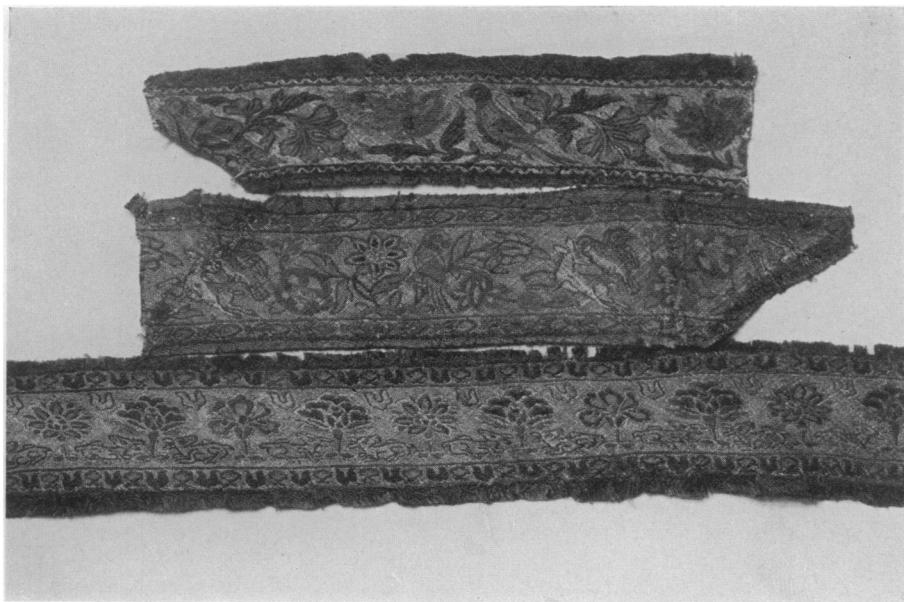
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PERSIAN AND OTHER TEXTILES

The Pennsylvania Museum has obtained a small collection of Persian and other textiles of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that fill a hitherto empty place in its Oriental series. Two of them are Mongolian,



KASHAN.
Seventeenth Century.

others show various influences, the larger number, however, perpetuate the Persian traditions of an earlier Persian age. Among these are fragments from Bokhara, Yezd, Kashan, Ispahan (of the Shah Abbas period, seventeenth

century). One from Bokhara with gold ground adorned with palm-like design of flowers, dating from the seventeenth century, is especially handsome. Another has gold palm designs on brick red satin ground. Of the nineteenth century, is a dark blue fragment woven with delicate yellow palm design and flowers, from Yezd. Especially interesting are two small fragments from Kashan (eighteenth century) showing the typical Persian style of animals and birds amid pomegranates and other flowers; and some pieces from Ispahan with fine floral designs, also of the Shah Abbas period. Nothing in the little col-



MONGOLIAN.
Sixteenth Century.

lection goes back beyond the sixteenth century, and that is only represented by two pieces distinctly Mongolian in character.

The influences that have brought into existence the ornamental phase of what we know as Persian Art are manifold, and there is now a tendency among critical specialists to see in the Persian designs, which have been supposed to influence Byzantine art, a reaction from an original influence on Persia from the West. This view seems to be fairly well supported by the evidence.

The point of contact between Persian textiles and the development of the Byzantine fabrics is well understood and has been generally admitted. Lessing held that the latter actually were manufactured in Persia, chiefly in the sixth

century.¹ Mr. Alan Cole (*Ornament in European Silks*, 1899) speaks of a Persian sculpture indicated on a dress showing a pattern of circles containing dragons similar to those found on some of the silks now preserved.² He proceeds to classify the designs as Sassanian, Egypto-Persian and Byzantine. Migeon³ begins his series with Sassanian tissues and illustrates some which all must agree are in fact Persian, but they are relatively late in date. C. Diehl, in his "*Manual d'art Byzantin*," 1910, follows the same order, as does Antonio Venturi in his "*Storia dell'Arte Italiana*," Vol. 1901, who remarks, in relation to the supposed Persian origin of the hunter type of pattern, that Herodotus had recorded that the Persians were taught to ride, shoot and tell the truth.

Mr. Lethaby has undertaken in the *Burlington Magazine* of December 15, 1913, to show that while a great number of fragments exist preserved in shrines and collections, a great many also are derived from Coptic graves, *i. e.*, the grave of Christian Egyptians, including Alexandrians. He examined many pieces in London museums and made these the basis for a critical study of current views regarding the subject.

Textiles patterned with figures, animals and birds were common in quite early Greek art. In the Alexandrian age the designs became ornate and frequently one motive was repeated all over the material. In early Christian days scenes from the gospels were wrought on garments, as is known from the protest of Bishop Asterius,⁴ and early ivories and glasses show elaborate garments.

Nearly all the Byzantine silks have subjects distributed in a series of circles, the borders of which may be linked by smaller ones. The larger circles contain hunting scenes, men spearing lions. These have been attributed to Persian origin. For instance, Diehl says: "The cavaliers symmetrically disposed . . . the design in circles with palmettes between, all attest a Persian model." But the development of the style in which patterns are repeated has not, as yet, been worked out. Mr. Lethaby's conclusions are that Alexandria first inaugurated the style with Egypto-Byzantine developments, the finest style appearing in the sixth century, the earliest style being represented by the Coptic fabrics found in graves. This Persia borrowed and distributed over the East. Then came the Oriental reaction bearing on the West. Constantinople became the center of the later style, the great wheel pattern of the tenth century, and onward, so characteristic of the later Byzantine art on which Saracenic art was to establish its foundation. It would seem as though this outline of Mr. Lethaby would explain all the facts, although there is no doubt whatsoever that at present the subject is confused and still doubtful.

Miss Isabella Errara, in her interesting article published in the *Burlington Magazine* of April 15, 1914, undertook a critical résumé of the discussion between Messrs. von Falke, von Forrer and Lethaby on the above question and concludes that various influences always have been mixed in the textile industry. Especially is this the case in Egypt, where Roman designs were mixed with

¹ See Dalton, "Byzantine Art and Archaeology," 1911, p. 584.

² See *Burlington Magazine*, December 15, 1913, and January 15, 1914, article on "Byzantine Silks in London Museums," by W. R. Lethaby.

³ "Les Arts des Tissus," 1909.

⁴ Dalton, *op. cit.*, p. 553.

Byzantine, Persian and even Chinese. She might well also have added that beneath all these remained an understratum of persistent ancient art. She says:¹ "This is the reason why it is almost impossible to say where fabrics come from and why it is possible to give only approximate dates except to those which bear inscriptions indicating the place and the precise moment of manufacture."

The stuffs called Coptic form a special class, of course, as they are found only in tombs of the Nile valley, although information as to the exact tomb in which each is found is usually lacking. In Egypt polychrome tapestries with stripes and lotus flowers go back to the eighteenth dynasty—say 1500 B. C. They have been found with cartouches of King Amenhotep II and some have been found in the sarcophagus of Thothmes III. Others are of very fine polychrome linen in stripes interspersed with lines of the rose pattern, as may be seen in the catalogue by Carter and Newberry. After these textiles, dated about 1500 B. C., nothing more is found dated until the Greek Crimean tombs of the fifth to third century B. C. These are in the Hermitage. Next come the familiar tapestries of Egypt, running in large numbers from the first century A. D. to the tenth or eleventh, as well as silk stuffs.

This previous history of these polychrome weaves lends strong foundations to Mr. Lethaby's contention with regard to the origins of the Persian decorative design of textiles; which, whatever their early beginnings, by the time those that interest us particularly were woven, had acquired a character and quality quite their own.

S. Y. S.



RECENTLY ACQUIRED CERAMICS

PERSIAN TILES.—A small but important collection of Persian tiles has been secured by purchase, with money generously contributed to the Museum by the Associate Committee of Women. The group consists of nine examples, ranging from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century, including a variety of styles not previously represented in the Museum collection. The accompanying illustrations will serve to show the forms and embellishments in black and white, but convey no idea of the colorings of the glazes and decorations.

No. 1. Panel measuring $7\frac{1}{4}$ x $12\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Decoration in relief, consisting of two human-headed animals, covered with a uniform turquoise blue glass glaze. From Sultanabad, Persia, and attributed to the thirteenth century.

No. 2. Square tile, dimensions $11\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The design, which is in relief, consists of a man riding an ox, led by another man, while a third follows. Above this is a marginal band containing three leopards in relief. The white stanniferous enamel which covers the surface is painted with a diapered floral background in lustre, showing Saracenic influence. From Rhages, or Rhei, in Northwestern Persia, and dates from the thirteenth century.

¹ Page 7.